# **Impact of Video Games on Society**

## **Section One: Introduction**

The gaming industry has grown immensely through the evolution of modern consoles, games and accessories. Therefore the ever growing hype that surrounds these technological gadgets is unprecedented even in the world of gamers, causing many adolescents to perceive video games consoles as a necessity in their lives, rather than an accessory. The impact of video gaming has been a debated issue for many years, and consequently the problem appears to be influencing many of my peers therefore I took this opportunity to explore the effect of video games on society.

This paper presents an investigation into the impact of video gaming on society to determine whether it leads to aggressive, violent and anti-social behavior. For the purpose of this examination the information has been divided into four sections. The first section examines what video games are and the genre of games which have resulted gamers displaying different behaviors. The next section assess how video games have an impact on society through real life examples, and then the possible factors which could lead to aggressive, violent and anti-social behavior. The final section in addition to a proposed solution to this issue, aims to discuss how effectively game ratings restrict inappropriate content from adolescent users.

There is no question that video games have an impact on society. One thing that is certain is that the gaming industry is growing rapidly which consequently increases the impact of video games on society.

## **Section Two: How do video games have an impact on society?**

Adolescents and children are the group of people which are mostly engrossed to video games in society. The vulnerability of these groups especially children is prominent, as they are at such crucial stages in their development that they are highly influenced by their environment. For this reason some concerns have arisen as to why “video games have become very influential story-tellers for this generation of children and youth” (McCain J 2000).This may be a result of the technological advances which have exposed new generations to more graphic games which emphasize violence. With regards to this argument there are two very opposite sides, the first being put by the gaming industry who argue that gaming is secure entertainment with no link to violence and the others being the psychologists and researchers who argue that violent media promotes aggression (Tompkins 2003).

Research dedicated to this issue is enormous, with “many scientific studies concluding that significant exposure to violent video games increases the risk of aggressive behavior in certain children. From this exposure children become desensitized to violence making them believe that the world is a ‘meaner and scarier’ place than it is” (Tompkins 2003). Unfortunately, these thoughts are often said to be difficult to change later on in life. Therefore children begin to think that violence is normal behavior as depicted in the games. The idea of violence in video games can be similar to that of domestic violence, where children who are exposed to violence either become offenders or victims as they believe that what they observe is the norm (Tompkins 2003). The development of these thoughts in gamers could potentially lead to gamers becoming more violent and aggressive over time.

The aspect of video games that is of most interest for this investigation is the content due to the fact that the violent content exposed to users can potentially be a factor which leads to aggressive outcomes (Gentile, Lynch, Linder & Walsh 2004). Although current researchers conclude violent affects, Dr Anderson himself describes the relationship between games and aggressive behavior as similar to that between smoking and cancer. This comparison illustrates the idea that exposure to violence in video games may not always necessarily lead to aggressive outcomes; likewise smokers do not always develop cancer. Nevertheless, the chances of video games causing violent behavior in adolescents are increased dramatically (Hian Hou 2009).

The negative effects of violent video games are evident in a recent study which involved adolescents playing two different games for 30 minutes. The researchers divided a group of 44 adolescents into two groups and randomly assigned the children to play one of the two games; the first being the high-octane “Need for Speed: Underground”, and the other the ultra-violent first-person shooter “Medal of Honor: Frontline”. Following the gaming session the children were given MRI’s (Magnetic resonance imaging) of their brains. The scans revealed that the adolescents who played “Medal of Honor”, as a result of the exposure to “violent and destructive scenes, showed an increase in emotional arousal and a corresponding decrease of activity in brain areas involved in self-control, inhibition and attention”(Kalning 2006). Unsurprisingly that same effect was not present in the children who played “Need for Speed”.

For many gamers the exposure to violent video games increases their violent behavior; the cumulative effect of the exposure to these realistic and disturbing graphics is that it is creating a more violent society. Many modern time games now have been designed to demonstrate stereotypical characters. For example regarding gender, the portrayal of men has caused many adolescents to learn from these violent games, but unfortunately they are getting the wrong messages across. The men which are often portrayed as large and aggressive characters have resulted in gamers using violence as a means to solve conflict and problems with negotiation and non-violent solutions being totally disregarded. The concept of the gamers solving issues themselves in a similar manner through the practice of violence and aggression in order to be a “man” becomes apparent in gamers, ultimately resulting in some gamers imitating scenes from games in real-life situations (Haymes 2009).

Despite the negative associations, some experts have come to other conclusions, strongly arguing that video games have no link to violence. In recent times Modern Warfare 2 has been criticized for its violent content but “it is not going to cause a change in adult behavior” (Barnett 2009) says Professor Mark Griffiths. The professor explained that “there is no definitive proof or research to show that violent video games make adults behave any more violently” (Barnett, 2009), adding that “younger gamers, typically under the age of eight tend to be more influenced by games and what they see on screen. They usually try and mimic what they have watched on the big screen. However adults, which this game is certified for, have already formed their cognitive sensibilities and will not usually start acting differently because of a video game” (Barnett 2009). Although these justifications sound reasonable they overlook the ease with which children can access violent and adult rated games. Currently video games cannot be certified to a specific group of people because the chances of a child obtaining a MA18+ rated game have increased due to the feeble enforcement of censorship regulations enforced in many countries.

## **Section Three: Factors which lead to aggression, violence and anti-social behavior.**

The most worrying issue is that most violent games are landing in the hands of millions of children, despite ratings attempting to restrict prohibited access. For this reason inappropriate games have become implicated in a string of recent school shootings and murders which has raised concerns to new heights (McCain J 2000).

Modern games are designed to be entertaining and challenging. The reality is that manufacturers are shamelessly exploiting children for revenue. Currently 89% of video games released contain some violent content. For this reason when consumers “specifically children, who are highly influenced by what they see on the big screen, expose themselves to violence they begin to incorporate aggressive concepts and behaviors into their typical behavioral repertoire” (Anderson, Gentile & Buckle 2007). Despite these unethical practices by manufacturers being scrutinized, many retailers still insist on advertising games where it is better to kill people, attack police and drive dangerously.

Although video games exposure is correlated to many negative outcomes, some research suggests that video game exposure independent of content is related to improvements in certain types of cognition and learning. These benefits are real but are limited, as the majority of games played tend to incorporate an increasing amount of violence and inappropriate content (Barlett, Anderson and Swing 2008). Despite some research in support of positive outcomes, the negative outcomes of video games are more evident. As research, in this case a meta-analysis by Anderson and Bushman (2001) found that across 54 independent tests of the relation between video games and violence, involving 4262 participants, there appeared to be five consistent results from playing games with violent content. Playing violent games tend to increase aggressive behaviors, awareness, emotions, and physiological arousal and decrease pro-social behaviors. These effects are noticeable and have been found in children and adolescents, in males and females and in experimental and non-experimental studies. Therefore it can be considered as concrete evidence supporting the negative effects of video games on gamers. Further research by Anderson suggests that exposure to violent video games may increase angry and hostile feelings while interacting with peers, teachers and adults which leads users to demonstrating fierce behavior (Anderson et al. 2004).

Perhaps the best example of violent video game influence over adolescents is the case of Dylan Klebold and Eric Harris. The two video game fanatics opened fire in their Colorado High School in 1999, killing 13 people. Experts made a convincing link between the murder and the continuous playing of video games with reports revealing that Harris and Klebold spent long hours playing video games like Wolfenstein 3D, Doom and Mortal Kombat. The two murderers enjoyed playing various violent games, which effectively played a focal role in their violent acts. Eric Harris had actually modified a version of the game Doom and placed it on his website.Â  In his version there were two shooters, extra weapons and other characters in the game that couldn’t shoot back. Harris and Klebold essentially acted-out their version of Doom on innocent classmates demonstrating how violent content in games played could have a pronounced influence on the user’s behavior and actions (Holmes 2005). The dramatic rise in violent shootings by adolescents many of which have been linked to playing violent video games supports the argument that video game violence transforms into real-world situations (Layton 2007).

The ethical question arising from these cases is that if these violent video games are having such a pronounced influence on gamers causing them to commit crimes in such a cruel manner, should they really be developed and sold in the first place. Moral concerns also arise with recent studies suggesting that adolescents playing such games have difficulty distinguishing between fantasy and reality, therefore guiding them to perform acts played on consoles in real life. (Video game sparked hammer murder 2004).

For many the line between reality and fantasy is lost through their addiction. In some fantasy games like “Second Life” players are able to live their fantasy life in a virtual world, to the point where the virtual world overrules their daily life. Even though these types of role playing games do not necessarily encourage aggressive or violent behavior, nevertheless they still contribute to the possibility of a gamer engaging in anti-social behavior as they create an alias where people can live technologically, contrary to their usual social life.

The addictive nature of video games can lead to gamers developing anti- social behavior. This addiction is so problematic that such games have affected non-adolescents day-to-day activities. An example of an addictive game is the popular online game “The World of Warcraft” which has over 10 million online users. Due to the extended hours spent playing these game extreme cases have occurred as excessive exposure to this online game has resulted in some mature aged gamers getting divorced, fired from their jobs, and in a rare case, someone dying as a result of the lack of sleep or proper nutrition (Do Video Games Cause Aggression and Death – The Truth About Video Game Effects 2010).

Often gamers can connect with multi-players around the world through the click of a button, without even meeting them or knowing who they are. The availability and easy access to the internet directly from the console eliminates the need for users to go out and socialize as these technological communications are in effect replacing social interactions for gamers; thus leading to isolation and the development of anti-social behavior over time.

On the other hand, a report by suggests that fun games which encourage teamwork and friendship can lay the groundwork for positive interaction between children, leading to better behavior and academic results (Thom 2009). Although these findings exemplify positive outcomes, they are limited as such results only apply to gamers who play non-violent and G-rated games. At present the number of ‘fun’ games has diminished as the growing culture within the gaming world demands more violent and adventure orientated games. For this reason the negative associations allied to video games are more apparent with an increasing number of gamers spending hours playing violent and role playing games, isolating themselves from the rest of the world. The exposure to long hours over time allows for basic social functions to be forgotten leading to players hesitating when handling social activities. Other impacts are loneliness, aggressiveness and disregard for rules and regulations. An initial addiction to video games which may not be considered severe can easily turn into a psychological anti-social disorder (Anti-Social Behaviour n.d.)

## **Section Five: Conclusion**

The impact of video games is apparent as it is affecting thousands of people around the world daily. From Street Fighter to FIFA 19 these games are impacting the gamers in society psychologically and physiologically. Many gamers have become attached to the life and person they believe they have become through virtual worlds experienced in games. These worlds have caused gamers who otherwise would not be living their ideal life in reality to get caught up in the fantasy and unrealistic expectations of video games.

Unfortunately, games which contain violent content are reaching our children’s hands, therefore encouraging them to act aggressively and anti-socially. One question which we should ask is “Who should be held responsible for the increase of video game exposure in society?” Are the gaming companies to blame for releasing highly graphic and violent games d, the irresponsible parents who allow their children to spend long hours playing inappropriate games or simply the young people who choose to play the games? Consequently, other possible issues attached to this effect can be examined; for example more stringent regulations or laws to implement impose accountability for the retailers. Therefore the focus for further research should be based on these questions that are emerging to possibly come to a conclusion about how to finally address this issue.

Currently there is no definitive solution to the issue of gaming and the effect that it has on the user’s behaviors. Nevertheless, there are some recommendations to a possible solution; these include the need for more governments to impose stricter rating systems, parents becoming more aware and responsible for their children’s game play and also gamers themselves becoming more mindful of separating the gaming world from the real world.